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Letter dated 26 September 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Greece to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to the letter dated 19 September 1997 (A/52/383-S/1997/732) addressed to you by the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations, in connection with the purchase by the Government of Cyprus of the anti-aircraft missile system S-300.

In this context, I should like to stress the self-evident point that no nation can abdicate its right of self-defence or shirk its responsibility to protect its citizens from aggression. As an independent State, Cyprus exercises this fundamental right, as recognized by the Charter of the United Nations, by improving the deterrent capabilities of the Cypriot National Guard, all the more since the Republic of Cyprus has been the victim of vicious aggression by Turkey, which has been occupying the northern part of the island with its troops since 1974.

In a series of resolutions the United Nations have confirmed again and again the need to respect the sovereignty, the territorial integrity and the independence of the Republic of Cyprus. Turkey has not complied with those resolutions, and the occupation forces still remain there. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has described the occupied area as "one of the most densely militarized areas in the world".

After 23 years of a stalemate which has seen the inability of the international community to achieve the withdrawal or even a reduction of the occupation forces, the need of the Republic of Cyprus to face this continuing threat is stronger than ever. The Government of Cyprus, like any Government in the world, has the responsibility and the duty to address the security of its citizens living under the shadow of a permanent threat.

Trying to redress somewhat the overwhelming imbalance, Cyprus has undertaken an effort to upgrade its defence. Suffice it to say that Turkey maintains in the occupied part of the island a battle-ready army of 36,000 troops. All the units are on a 100 per cent level of readiness and manning. The offensive capability of the largely armed force is spearheaded by 280 modern tanks, and air support is available at a 10-minute distance from the nearby Turkish mainland, where a force of at least 80 F-16s and other combat aircraft is concentrated.

Greece, itself a guarantor power, has the legal and moral obligation to assist this effort, given its commitment under the 1960 Treaties of Alliance and Guarantees to support Cyprus in the event of any attempt by Turkey to attack and further extend the occupied area.

The joint defence doctrine, to which the Permanent Representative of Turkey made reference in his letter, is the expression of the considerations described above on the practical level. It has no offensive content, given that no one can conceivably argue that either Greece or Cyprus intends to undertake an invasion or any kind of attack against Turkey. The only objective is to provide a more credible defence on Cyprus, against odds that remain extremely overwhelming, in the face of a continuing illegal occupation.

Turkey's objections to the concept of upgrading Cypriot defence with a system of purely anti-aircraft missiles have the sole intention of protecting the military status quo on the island that the international community has condemned and that the Security Council has deemed unacceptable in the clearest of terms.

The Turkish reaction to the deployment of a purely defensive weapon by the Republic of Cyprus can only be understood through the statement made by Mr. Gurel, Minister of State in the Government of Mr. Mesut Yilmaz, who specifically said that "there are weapons systems being installed in Cyprus, which are endangering our military supremacy there".

Despite the above, the Government of Cyprus had made the continuation of its defence programme dependent upon a just and viable solution of the Cyprus problem through diplomatic or political means, or the demilitarization of the island.

In this respect, it is useful to recall that in 1993 President Clerides proposed the complete demilitarization of the island, a proposal that is still on the table. Its acceptance by Turkey, or the display of genuine will to consider it seriously, would greatly facilitate the parties in tackling and eventually overcoming the present difficulties.

Finally, let me point out that the threatening statements contained in the letter of the Turkish Permanent Representative, who asserts that "Turkey cannot remain indifferent to developments" and "will take corresponding measures", do not in any way constitute a new or, indeed, a surprising element. They reflect, on the contrary, the consistent pattern of thought and action of Turkish foreign policy, which repeatedly uses threats in order to prevent the exercise of the legitimate rights of other countries. May I recall, in this respect, my letter

to your predecessor (A/50/216-S/1995/476) dated 9 June 1995, with which I brought to his attention the similar threats, expressed at the highest and most official political level in Turkey through the resolution adopted on 8 June 1995 by the Turkish National Assembly, empowering the Turkish Government to declare war if Greece implemented the Convention on the Law of the Sea and exercised her legitimate right to extend her national territorial waters to 12 miles.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 61, and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Christos ZACHARAKIS
Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Greece
to the United Nations